

CONTACT: Jeff Lustgarten, 323/466-3445
Don Rhodes, 213/236-1840



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SCAG APPROVES PLAN TO FUND SHORT-TERM TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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SCAG Regional Council Also Adopts Funding Strategies To Ensure Southern California Receives Its Fair Share Of Transportation Dollars

LOS ANGELES, CA. – After extensive public review and policy debate, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Regional Council approved the 2004 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). The RTIP is the critical implementation document that provides funding for all major transportation projects in the six-county Southern California region over the next six years.

The 2004 RTIP calls for spending approximately \$18.5 billion on transportation investments within the next six fiscal years (2004/05 – 2009/10). It includes hundreds of individual transportation priorities, including highway and road improvements, rail and bus facilities, high occupancy vehicles (HOV) lanes, signal synchronization, intersection improvements, and other key projects throughout Southern California.

In developing the 2004 RTIP, SCAG worked closely with county transportation commissions (i.e., Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Orange County Transportation Authority, Riverside County Transportation Commission, San Bernardino Associated Governments, etc.) and other government agencies. The county transportation commissions proposed projects for their respective counties and then forwarded their list of priorities to SCAG. SCAG then accumulated the projects into a single regional program, which was then analyzed to ensure that it conforms to state and federal requirements, including air quality standards.

The RTIP was originally scheduled for review and final adoption by the SCAG Regional Council in August. However, additional efforts were needed to identify sufficient revenue sources and modify the implementation schedules of certain projects to ensure that the plan would conform to federal air quality requirements.

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Since the August Regional Council, SCAG has worked closely with several county transportation commissions to make the necessary modifications to the plan. Both the Orange County Transportation Authority and the Riverside County Transportation Commission have committed to ensuring the timely implementation of critical projects. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority will consider additional modifications at their September 23rd Board meeting to ensure that Los Angeles County priority projects will be fully funded to meet established implementation schedules.

In addition to approving the 2004 RTIP, the Regional Council also recognized the need for a long-term strategy to address continuing fiscal challenges and implementation issues for meeting the region's transportation needs. SCAG committed to undertake a series of strategies to address these financial challenges, including:

- **Increase Public Awareness:** Work with the county transportation commissions and local government agencies to initiate a coordinated public awareness campaign and legislative initiative to protect transportation funding that was to be allocated under the voter-approved Proposition 42.
- **Ensure Fair Share:** Address the state's allocation of funds between Northern and Southern California to ensure that the region receives its fair share of transportation dollars.
- **Foster Regional Advocacy:** Coalesce the region behind a federal advocacy effort to secure additional federal discretionary funds through the congressional appropriations process.
- **Seek Ethanol Remedies:** Seek legislative remedies via Congress to ensure that ethanol blends are taxed at the same rate as conventional gasoline. Without such a remedy, the region would stand to lose approximately \$300 million each year.
- **Push Federal Reauthorization:** Support the prompt reauthorization of the federal surface transportation act.
- **Facilitate Public/Private Partnerships:** Support efforts to facilitate the development of transportation projects via innovative public/private partnerships.
- **Support Local Revenue Efforts:** Provide support to individual county efforts to raise transportation funds via sales tax ballot measures.

The RTIP will now go to CalTrans, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration for their concurrent review. The plan must be certified by the federal and state oversight agencies on or before October 4, 2004 for the region to maintain its current air quality conformity standing.